

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

February
2010

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

Special
200th
Issue



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Annual School Guide

\$5.95 U.S.



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with Finn & Jake
Will Rock Your World in 2010!**

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Cover: Cartoon Network
and Frederator Studios present
Pendleton Ward's *Adventure
Time with Finn and Jake*,
premiering in March on CN.

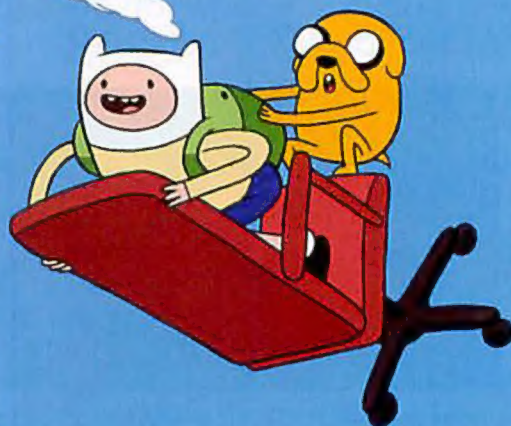


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*The Simpsons: The Complete 20th
Season* (courtesy of
20th Century Fox Home Ent.).
The set is available on DVD and
Blu-ray Jan. 12, 2010.



And Now for Something Entirely Brilliant!



Adventure Time with Finn and Jake, one of the most anticipated shows of the year, is set to premiere on Cartoon Network in March.

by Ramin Zahed

Pendleton Ward is living the kind of life every animation student dreams about. Only a few years after graduating from CalArts, he has seen his short *Adventure Time* win numerous festival awards, be nominated for an Annie Award for Best Short in 2008 and developed into a hugely anticipated new series, which is set to premiere on Cartoon Network next month. So what is it about the tale of a young boy

and his talking dog that has won the hearts of animation lovers and generated over 2 million hits on YouTube worldwide?

Fred Seibert, the se-

ries executive producer and the man behind the successful Frederator Studios' animation pilot program *Random! Cartoons*, which originally greenlit the short, believes Ward's unique vision was quite unlike anything that he had seen on commercial TV in the past. "What's clear about it is that Pen is a significant talent who is able to get into a kid's mind and construct the project in a way that is easy for us to follow, while the characters work through all these interesting non-sequiturs," says Seibert, the award-winning toon impresario who has jumpstarted some of the best animated shows of the past two decades, including *The Fairly OddParents*, *My Life as a Teenage Robot* and *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy*, as well as the latest addition to the Nickelodeon lineup, *Fanboy and Chum Chum*.

Seibert says the genius of the original short was in the way Ward was able to have the main characters Finn and

Jake jump from one subject to the next in a matter of seconds, in a way that would make perfect sense to a child. "Meanwhile, in seven short minutes, we know everything that we want to know about these characters," he adds. "It's got emotion, adventure, comedy and heart and he uses a visual animation style that to my eyes, hasn't



Fred Seibert



Pendleton Ward



This is Pen's exclusive sketch of the Animag interview!



Flights of Fancy: Pendleton Ward's whimsical new series stars Jeremy Shada as Finn, John Di Maggio as Jake, and Tom Kenny as the Ice King.



been used since the days of Felix the Cat and the Fleischer brothers. This kind of surrealism has been missing in the past century. Then again, when you listen to the soundtrack and the words that are said, you know that his show couldn't have been done before 2000 because it's equally influenced by the world of videogames."

Ward, a 27-year-old San Antonio native who was encouraged at an early age by his mom, an abstract painter, says he has always been interested in mixing adult and childish humor, the way shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Ren & Stimpy* have done in the past. "I like to doodle these characters and kind of figure out what their story is. I really try not to over-think anything. In fact, I try to make everything stupider and simpler. Finn and Jake are two buddies who shoot the breeze about whatever nonsense is going

on around them—just like anyone sitting on a porch might do."

Aiming to return to simpler, happier times, Ward and his team strive for a faux-naïf style that is easy on the eyes and is reminiscent of the the lazy Sunday afternoon mood of Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip.

"I'm trying to make the cartoon nice to watch," he explains.

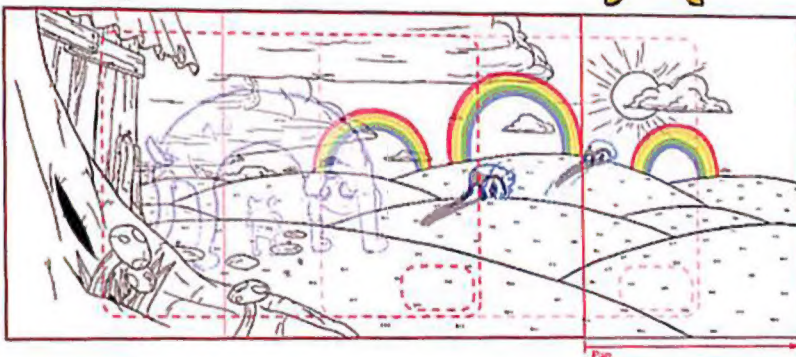
I want the characters to feel like they really exist in the world, so I avoid cartoony slapstick and lean towards magical realism."

According to Seibert, the

original short was only a brief sample of the imaginative heights Ward is able to scale. "The short really just scratched the surface—it was just a sketch of what's going on in Pen's mind," he notes. "Without sacrificing any of the original design style, the show has increased the visual and story sophistication. He truly has a whole world of characters that is ready to be explored, and there are infinite stories to be told about them."

Ward, who also worked on Cartoon Network's Emmy-winning series *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*, says he was stunned when he first got the phone call about Cartoon Network wanting to pick up his show. "I knew I should say something, like 'Wow!' but deep inside my head, I was freaking. I was thinking, now how do I go about executing this the best way possible?"

Seibert says it's not unusual for the crew of the show to arrive early





Divine Design: Adventure Time's character designers are Phil Rynda, Tom Herpich, and Natasha Allegri. Nick Jennings is the art director and Pat McHale is the creative director.

in the morning at the show's offices to find Ward sleeping on the couch in the studio. He eats, drinks, sleeps and dreams about the show all the time. Ward has been thinking about *Adventure Time* so much that he even gets detailed ideas about the way characters act or things they do from his dreams.

"I do everything that's laid out in front of me, every day, all day long" adds Ward. "We've all been working very hard on the show—we have a 30-person crew here, and about 60 people working overseas at Rough Draft and Saerom. I am really proud of the way the show looks now and think it's going to be really nice to watch."

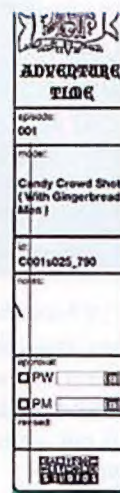
The first season of *Adventure Time with Finn and Jake* is made up of 26 11-minute episodes, and Cartoon Network has already ordered another 26 episodes for the second season of the show. Traditionally animated and storyboard-driven, the toon is a heady mélange of influences that range from *The Simpsons* to Hayao Miyazaki's surreal universe.

"I hold Miyazaki's work in the highest regard and aspire to create something as beautiful," notes Ward. "There's a scene in one episode where Jake is riding his bike in the woods and he's talk-



ing to a worm that came out of the violin he was carrying in his bike basket. The worm's giving Jake advice about ladies and Jake's getting lost in his head as he talks about his issues. He's gesturing with his hands and keeps losing control of the bike's handlebars. Then he grabs back on again and repeats the cycle as few times before crashing into a tree. I think that's a really nice moment! As long as there is a brief moment like that in an episode I think the whole thing is successful to me."

Seibert, who has played a big role in changing the way animation is produced and distributed in the past two decades, believes that imaginative artists like Ward and *Fanboy and Chum Chum* creator Eric Robles are redefining a brave new era of TV animation. "For me, the biggest challenge is to keep up with the creative artists who make up the team. They are the ones



who can see the future, they can see around the corners. I hate to admit it, but I originally wasn't going to do *Adventure Time*, but luckily my colleague Eric Homan [Frederator's VP of development] shamed me into doing it. He was one of the guys who could see the future. Ward has carefully and lovingly put together a wonderful, talented team—from co-executive producer

Derek Drymon to the production assistants—everyone who works on the show shares his creativity and forward-thinking vision."

For now, both Seibert and Ward are hoping that viewers will watch the show and be reminded of how animation can open new windows to magical places where a childlike imagination can roam freely. As Seibert points out, "Every 10 to 15 years, people look around and say, 'Hey, is that all there is in cartoons?' *Adventure Time* is the perfect example that in the world of animation, it's never going to be 'Is that all there is?' This is the future of how people will tell stories in animation." ■

Adventure Time with Finn and Jake premieres on Cartoon Network in March. You can find out more about the toon at frederatorblogs.com/adventure_time.